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Light verb constructions vs. preverbal verbs in Looma
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When dealing with light verb constructions (LVCs) in a particular language, one of the most intriguing problems is the status of nouns forming part of them. Do they differ from “normal” NPs, and if so, in what exactly? The data collected during my fieldwork with the speakers of Woi-Bhalaga, a Guinean dialect of Looma (South-Western <Mande> Niger-Congo) spoken in the region around Macenta, the prefectural capital of Guinean Looma, show that nominal elements used in LVCs are of an intermediate nature between “true” NPs and preverbs. In the present paper I’m going to compare two types of verb-formation —preverbalization and LVC formation —with emphasis on the properties of nominal constituents of the derivatives.

LVC formation is a very productive means of verbal derivation in Looma. For many LVCs, there are corresponding full verbs, often resulting from conversion of the noun used in the LVC, cf. *kúwábòg*, lit. ‘make a dance’ = *kúwá* ‘dance’, *ɲɛ̀ɛ̀ bòg*, lit. ‘make a laugh’ = *ɲɛ̀ɛ̀* ‘laugh’.

NPs in LVCs can (and generally do) attach the definite article (1–2) or be modified by the attribute (2):

- (1) *Táá māsá-gì tó-gí zéy-vé ná nú-í-tì mà.*
REF\|village chief-DEF REF\|law-DEF sit.down-RES 3SG.POSS person-DEF-PL on
‘The chief of the town **has imposed a law** on his people’.
- (2) *É tíí wólá-y là-vè ná táázú-vé.*
3SG.BASE REF\|rice.field be.big-DEF put.down-RES 3SG.POSS village-DEF.LOC
‘He **laid out a big field** in his village’.

Nevertheless, in some LVCs the noun is more often used without definite article. Such use is characteristic, for example, for the constructions *ǵázáséy* ‘marry (of man)’ (*ǵzá* ‘woman’); *síníg sèyè* ‘marry (of woman)’ (*síníg* ‘husband’); *kònò kúlá* ‘feed’ (*kònòg* ‘food’), and some others. The data available demonstrate that in most cases (exceptions will be discussed on the paper) it is not a referent status of the NP in question, but rather syntactic function and TAM-features of the construction that determines the presence/absence of the definite article on the NP, cf.:

- (3) *Nà má-bòè vǵàzà-gá gà Zèzé ǵzá zéy-dá.*
that DET-speech scatter-PRF that Zeze woman sit.down-PRF
‘A rumor spread that Zeze **had married**’.
- (4) *Gè ǵzá-y zéy-dà-y wòlù má, gè là*
1SG.BASE woman-DEF sit.down-PTCP.RES-DEF then 1SG.BASE NEG
dé dèyè yá-ní.
yet 1SG.Pf\|younger.sibling see-AOR
‘After I **had married**, I didn’t see my younger brother anymore’.

The ability on the nouns to be used in such LVCs without definite article makes it tempting to compare the LVCs with preverbal verbs, which are highly widespread in South Western and South Mande languages (Vydrin 2009). Preverbs are elements of nominal origin, mostly with locative semantics:

- (5) *Zíé-y nì wú wòòzà-nì.*
REF\|water-DEF this bottom be.tall-AOR
‘This water is deep’.

On the present stage, preverbs in Looma are weakly separable elements modifying semantics of the verbal stem. The degree of their integration, both semantic and morphological, with a verbal stem is higher than that of nouns in LVCs. At large, LVCs in Looma form a continuum some elements of which are closer to preverbal verbs and both of them develop in the direction towards “normal” verbs.

References

Vydrin, Valentin. 2009. Preverby v dan-gweetaa [Preverbs in Dan-Gweetaa]. *Voprosyazykoznanoya* 2: 75–84.